British Poet Philip Larkin

A Synopsis

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New formulation in Movement Poetry: A critique of Philip Larkin

Introduction

Poetry is a type of art that uses not only words, but also various forms and patterns of sound. Poetry also relies upon imagery and figurative language to convey the message. English poetry has witnessed an extensive and worthy history. Roots of English poetry can be traced back as early as eight century with *Beowulf*. The conquest of England by Normans in 1066 brought the gradual transition of English into Middle English. There were many poets writing during middle ages. The form of poetry during this period was often religious and romantic in nature. Geoffrey Chaucer was perhaps the most famous poet of this period. He is also known as the 'Father of English poetry'. His emergence brought a new era in English poetry. At an early age he was promoted to the rank of Esquire. He was influenced by the works of Dante, Boccaccio, and Froissart. In Chaucer's age, English was not the language of high culture. Chaucer gave impetus to the development of English as a literary language by deciding to write in English. He added new words from French, Latin, Spanish, and Italian and enriched the English language. Chaucer invented the rhyme royal. His most celebrated work was 'Canterbury tales'. The age of revival was the period followed by the death of Geoffrey Chaucer. This period witnessed a wide range of political changes, wars, famine, and pandemics. It is also known as 'Dark Ages'. Literature in this age introduced sonnets, pastoral poetry, allegory, ballads, satire, and didactic poems. Thomas Wyatt who is called the pioneer of the new English, belonged to this age. He experimented in stanza forms including the rondeau, epigrams, terza rima, ottava rima, satires. He also explored mono-rime, triplets, quatrains, French forms of douzaine and treizaine. In words of David Daiches, "It is with Thomas Wyatt that modern English poetry can be seen to begin". Elizabethan era gave rise to courtly poetry. This era saw a remarkable flourishing of arts and literature. The era was mainly dominated by William Shakespeare and drama was the primary genre in Elizabethan era. Although this era was dominated by drama, many writers worked on the critical analysis of the literature. George Gascoigne's: 'Certayne Notes of Instruction' considered to be the first English manual of versification. Followed by William Webb's: 'Discourse of English poetry'. George Puttenham's: 'The Arte of English Poesie' considered to be the most ambitious and comprehensive undertaking in Elizabethan criticism. Famous 'The Defence of Poesie' by Philip Sidney was the first serious attempt to apply the classical rules to English poetry. The spirit of

neo-classical poetry was imagination and emotions. This age admired the original Augustan writers. Victorian poetry molded a foundation for varied forms like realism, pessimism, mortality, sentimentality, humor, and dramatic monologue. Modern poetry is difficult to define as it is most often written in free verse.

Contemporary poetry emphasized on suggesting an idea rather than overtly stating it. Contemporary period was the period which was still recovering the effects of world wars and the power shift of Britain. This gave rise to various revolts. People didn't know what to call these uprisings, so it was simply called 'The Movement'. Members include Kingsley Amis, Donald Davie, D. J. Enright, John Wain, Elizabeth Jennings, Thom Gunn and Robert Conquest. The term was coined in 1954 by J. D. Scott. He was a literary editor of The Spectator. The main objective of these poets was to have simple, sensuous, traditional, conventional and dignified form of poetry. The Movement poets tried to preserve the importance of English Poetry, and Britain's supremacy in world politics. The group didn't want exhaustion of English poetry over the new modernist poetry. The Movement sparked the divisions among different types of British poetry. Their poems were yearning for the earlier Britain and were filled with pastoral images of the decaying way of life as Britain, which moved farther from the rural and more towards the urban. The Movement ascended in the mid-1950s around the works and thoughts of three young men: Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis and John Wain. Three poets who were unlike one another yet shared certain perspective and distrust of flamboyant mannerisms. The Movement might have begun a little bit earlier. 1940s in the writings of some poets and writers like Oscar Mellor, John Wain, G. S. Fraser and Iain Fletcher, who's critical readings and literary products were among the early manifestations of this new spirit which rejected the 1940s poetic taste. Since no body was quite clear on what this new spirit stood for, it was commonly called 'The Movement'. Of all the poets of the Movement, it was Philip Larkin who gained the celebration and admiration of Robert Conquest who championed him and considered him an embodiment of all the principles of the Movement.

Philip Larkin, English poet and novelist was a prominent member of "The Movement". He was born on 9th August 1922 in Coventry. He studied in King Henry VIII Grammar School in Coventry. He completed his B.A. with first class in 1943 from Oxford University. He also attended St. John's college, where he became friends with Kingsley Amis who helped him to understand and fulfil his literary objectives. Very soon he became famous as a novelist.
His first novel "*jill"* was published in 1946 and next novel "*A Girl in Winter"* was published in 1947. "The *Whitsun Weddings"* have some auto-biographical elements. His first poetry was "The North Ship".

At the age of sixty-two he published a collection of essays entitled “Larkin at sixty”, which was edited by Anthony Thwaite. Later years he suffered from cancer. He died on 2 December 1985, at the age of 63, and was buried at Cottingham municipal cemetery near Hull.

Objectives of Research

The study will be conducted with the following specific objectives in view:

- To conceptualize Movement poetry.
- To identify Larkin’s association with movement poetry.
- To evaluate the poems of Larkin as humanist poems.
- To examine the thematic concerns in Larkin poems.
- To highlight post war English poetry.
- To explore Larkin’s role as a poet and a narrator.

Review of Literature

1. Baton Rouge, The Movement Against Itself: British Poetry of the 1950s Elon, Florence. The Southern Review; Vol. 19, Iss. 1, (Jan 1, 1983): 88.

Following the decade after world war British poetry hinted to a backlash to the atrocities associated with war. This is shown more prominently in the poetry of writers associated with ‘The Movement’. It was described as anti-phony, skeptical, robust and ironic.

2. Terry Whalen, Philip Larkin: Detachment or Impersonality? Critical Review; Melbourne Vol. 23, (Jan 1, 1981): 20.

Although Larkin assures a stature as one of the most imperious poet of the time, yet he is perceived as an embittered, resentful and detached from life. He is not detached from life but is profoundly pessimistic about it. Majority of Larkin’s poetry shows attention to the dismal aspect of human experience, and somehow manages to praise life along with steady eye on its bleaker aspects.

3. Terry Whalen. Philip Larkin and English Poetry University of British Columbia press. X, 164

Philip Larkin’s beauteousness and his importance in the tradition of English Poetry can be reevaluated by debating that, Larkin had more complex temperament, and this is shown in his

poetry which is very explorative and positive, but it is generally not recognized. Larkin's

employment of ‘cynical’ persona is often pointed out, but it characteristically transforms when he discovers an urge to be more serious. Larkin’s poetry surpasses the nihilistically dejected mentality.

4. Şiiri Taner, THE MOVEMENT AND THE POETRY OF PHILIP LARKIN

The Movement ve Philip Larkin

The Movement had uncertain beginnings in the 1950s, and define a prolific era of English poetry. However, the Movement did not start as a proper literary group with a clear manifesto, that is, there is no an intricate pattern of alliances, or a precise set of principles acknowledged by these poets. The theoretical contours of the Movement poetry had been defined through the poems, interviews and private writings of Philip Larkin. Larkin’s poetry represented the sensibilities of the postwar English society. He was attracted to the sense of provincialism that dominated the post-war era. The strong sense of provincialism and anti-modernist principles in his poetry help establish a link between Larkin and the poetic style that came to be referred to as the Movement.

Statement of problem

This study aims to investigate Philip Larkin from the perspective of modernism and how he shifts away from Movement poetry. This paper is trying to examine the poems to find out that how Philip Larkin has portrayed the Modern man in regard to religion and church. The main objective of this study is to find out the role of Larkin as a poet and as a narrator himself. We will analyze that how Larkin has presented modern man image through his own personality. He unveils the character of modern man as agnostic, materialistic, spiritually dead. The shift in pronoun from ‘I’ to ‘we’ and ‘my’ to ‘our’ in his poems endorses his shift from individualism to socialism and makes the poems humanist poems.

Methodology

To find the origin for this literature review, various database was employed. To begin, Google scholar was utilized to take early samples of related articles. A broad-spectrum search on Google scholar was used to set up a list of research articles which were backed up by primary source. Initially, basic search of *poetry of Philip Larkin* was used. The data collected

helped to use more refined and detail search terms for data collection. A great amount of data collection was also done from the library of Shyam University. Other functions like thesaurus were used to narrow down the search terms.

The search terms appointed for this literary analysis consists of: *Movement poetry, early works of Philip Larkin, later works of Philip Larkin, Impact of Movement poetry on society, Criticism of Philip Larkin.* Above terms were used combined with "AND" command to obtain most narrowed and relative articles. In addition, surplus of data was collected by using the snowball method.

Chapterisation

The systematic presentation of the Research Work is divided into various chapters. The description of every chapter will depend on the nature of collection of data and information.

1. Introduction

The history of British literature will be the background as the political and social issues form a base to create literature through the centuries. The effect of war on society and mankind will be reflected through the poems of Larkin.

2. Movement poetry and Movement poets

The chapter will describe the characteristics of movement poetry and the poets associated with the trend. Larkin's poetic output will be explored.

3. Early poetry of Philip Larkin

The chapter will analyse the early poems of Larkin from various angles.

4. Later poetry of Philip Larkin

The chapter will analyse the later poems of Larkin from various angles.

5. Conclusion

The chapter will conclude the similarities and dissimilarities of the early and later poetry of Larkin; his leaning towards the abstruse and the complex and moving towards the simple and the common; symbolic mappings and his interest in apocalyptic.

6. Bibliography

Conclusion

Philip Larkin's early poetry leans towards the abstruse and the complex. Later Larkin rejects his early style vehemently in favour of the simple and the common. Same goes for religious and semi-biblical references, which find their way to his early poems. The current study investigates Larkin's interest in the apocalyptic, but not in the fashion of the Apocalypse Poets of the late 1930 and early 1940s. The apocalyptic in the current study is a symbolic or surreal event that may have a biblical dimension to it. It is invented to propel secular arguments relevant to the futility of existence, precariousness of the world, defeatism of all human pursuits and the inevitable final downfall. It is hence more affiliated to Apocalyptic Literature without officially going under that label. The study examines poems from Juvenilia and The North Ship to expose that the apocalyptic spectacles dating in the early verse were not mere accidents, but carefully contemplated motifs and well-designed symbolic mappings.

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